



Do's and Don'ts of Campus Activism

Planning on engaging in activism on campus? Familiarize yourself the following tips before gearing up! These tips are important for advocating on behalf of any issue and when defending your free speech rights on campus. Regardless of how you choose to apply them, be persistent in your activism. Good luck!

KNOW YOUR POLICIES AND KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

DO familiarize yourself with your **school's policies** to find out what rights and privileges your school guarantees. These can be found in your student handbook or in your school's promotional materials. It's also important that you understand your legal rights on campus so that you can protect and defend them. You can learn about your rights in FIRE's **Guide to Free Speech on Campus**. If your school has restrictive policies, you can work to change them. Policies that prohibit or restrict speech protected by the First Amendment, known as speech codes, are evaluated by FIRE staff and compiled in our searchable **Spotlight** database.

DON'T be intimidated. On almost every campus, you have a right to speak your mind. Never be afraid to defend your rights, but don't assume that every administrator you encounter is out to violate them. Seek to establish cooperation and develop rapport so that if there is a disagreement or conflict, there's still common ground from which to move forward. University administrators can be powerful allies when it comes to protecting and defending student expression on campus.

BUILD COALITIONS

DO reach out to other student groups. Look for support in unexpected places. Robust freedom of speech and freedom of association rights are in the best interest of all organizations on campus. Even students that disagree with your beliefs can be powerful allies in the fight for free speech on campus.

DON'T silence others. Other groups on campus have the same right as you to make their voices heard, even if you don't agree with them. You can always learn from talking and debating with people who disagree with you.

USE COMMON SENSE

DO plan any demonstrations in accordance with reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions expressed in your school's written policies. The First Amendment does not require schools to allow a loud protest in the dead of night (and that's also probably not the best way to convince people to join your cause). But remember—these restrictions must be reasonable and content- and viewpoint-neutral!

DON'T be caught off-guard. Some groups use civil disobedience—nonviolent unlawful conduct engaged in intentionally—as a form of protest. The First Amendment does not protect civil disobedience. If you choose to use this as a tactic to draw attention to your cause, be prepared for the consequences, which may include arrest and punishment through your school's disciplinary process.



For more information about your protest rights, check out FIRE's [FAQ for Student Protests on Campus](#).

DOCUMENT EVERYTHING

DO archive emails, take notes in meetings, and shoot video on your phone. Make sure that you record openly. If you are promised funding, a venue, a changed policy, or any other type of commitment from your school, ensure it is in written or email form. The same goes for denials of any of your requests. A saved record of a disapproval or rejection can help you later on in appealing or challenging the school's decision. Following up after an in-person meeting with an email is an easy way to make sure commitments or denials are recorded.

DON'T rely on memory. When in doubt, write it down.

ASK FOR HELP

DO [contact FIRE](#). FIRE is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization here to help students and faculty. We offer helpful resources—like our [Guides](#) outlining student rights—for students and student-activists alike, and we work to correct the violation of students' rights on campus in a variety of ways. We've successfully helped students challenge their schools for failing to respect their rights and defend students every day by providing other services, such as writing letters to administrators, giving advice, and more. FIRE is in your corner, and we have a winning record for students just like you.

DON'T be silent. If you have something to say, say it!